For listings

Dagmar Richter
The Art of Copy: Rereading the City

December 5, 1992-**January 15,** 1993

Opening Reception: December 5, Saturday, 6-8 pm
Gallery Hours: Tuesday-Saturday 12-6 pm

Projects
Berlin III
An Earthscratching for Century City
Rebuilding Beirut -- Misreading the War

The Art of Copy, an exhibition by Los Angeles based architect Dagmar Richter, is an exploration for alternatives in the cultural and urban patterns. Using cities at extremes -- fragmentation of Los Angeles, staticism of Berlin and destruction of Beirut -- her work introduces horizontal interconnections, implosion of boundaries and stitching of environmental wounds. Her intent is to mediate conflicts between urban and cultural realities, and to delineate a feminist language for architectural formalism and urban strategies.

Dagmar Richter
THE ART OF COPY

How then must a society be conditioned so that experience with history can integrate itself into the work of real experienced architecture without it being again and anew the bearer of past images.1

The Marked-The Unmarked2
At the beginning of the century architecture and the arts tried to wipe the slate clean. Modernists claimed to destroy the bourgeois patriarchal nature of ornament and spatial organisation by creating spaces without any historical traces. It was to be made difficult, as Walter Benjamin wrote, to 'leave traces' because traces will go against man as they force upon him a pattern of habit.3 The surface of the wall should not be a surface for images, but rather should just be organised (in an aesthetic, hygienic sense). The grid as an organisational form should produce a silence that allows all to breathe.

It seems obvious that a feminist approach to architecture might once again try to gain authority through a similar architectural praxis of negation.

Negation as a basis of architectural design actually brought us two readings, that of silence, which allowed the user to free himself from the terror of consumerism and historical bonds; and that of totalisation, which was read as brutal suppression. Within a well established oppositional thinking framework, one had to choose between a purist negation or a positivist historicist approach. Both arguments limit the possibility of a more sophisticated reading by all users.

It is the space inbetween which ought to be investigated. The following research tries to find an architecture in which one does not have to move into the realm of the unmarked or into restating a cultural representation which is politically questionable, but in which one establishes difference by moving towards the realm of experience by, as Benjamin wrote, 'the collective in an absent minded state'.

The Author
Architecture finds itself in a decade of massive PR for a few singular authors-a situation in which the popular press is more fascinated by Philip Johnson's political past and current power plays, Peter Eisenman's latest faux pas or Michael Graves' shoes than it is by their work.

What is sold on the commercial architectural market is not so much the product, but the 'aura' of a unique author, an aura that is given currency by the public's insistence on establishing the author, not the work, as the authority. The work, then, is imprisoned in a framework of easily recognisable repetition which, established as s style, signifies the author

even if he pronounces the author for dead, and cannot be changed without the author losing authority. This crisis of authority goes so far today that several authors use specific decorative props (the spectacles, the particular bow tie, suspenders, etc) and do not dare to change these trademarks for fear of undercutting their easy recognisability.

Of course there is always authorship, always an author, but its definition seems to be nothing other, as El Lissitzky described it, 'than a frozen motion picture of a process'. For those new members in this cultural production, who only slowly enter the discourse, this myth of authorship is a critical one. To concentrate on the process of making sheds some critical light on this issue. Creativity, brilliance, eternal value and the secret4 were questionable concepts Benjamin already addressed a long time ago and they still seem questionable within the architectural production today.

> It is not history which is the burden, but the fact that the
> historical tradition in the institutionalised cultural world has
> been made into an instrument of power.5

The Art of Copy
The following projects were used to establish a methodology based on the art of copy. Most of the spaces we experience are random and circumstantial; some of it consciously formulated, most of it the product of chance. We are confronted with numerous levels and layers of visual text and physical experience, much of which is not the product of any conscious architectural act. As a result, our sites of operation have been surfaces which let us read numerous different layers of physical information simultaneously, most of which is not institutionalised and is experienced by everyone. Rosalind Krauss has written:

> The pattern books that are the backbone of architectural
> production, so that a building can be cooked up from a detail
> taken from here and a ground plan drawn from there, are just
> one example of the extent to which production has always
> been at one level the art of making copies from other art.6

BERLIN III
Project Credits: Dagmar Richter and Ulrich Hinrichsmeyer
In 1988 Kristin Feireiss along with the Senate of Berlin organised an exhibition to which architects around the world were invited. The exhibition was called Berlin: Monument or model for thought. At that time the still existing wall was one of the major obstacles addressed by most of the architects.

We decided to produce a pure model of thought-a Berlin III-totally walled in and mentally accessible from both sides. The formal expression of this Berlin III was the result of a process of translations from a number of images and spatial information into an imaginary imploding block structure at the site of the former Potsdam station, situated between East and West Berlin. The material we used for the copying process ranged far and wide: from Richter paintings to examples of implosive space, like airships under construction and photographs of black holes, from the Merz Bau by Kurt Schwitters to a computer chip from a communications network, finally including the traces and memories of physical structures left on the site.

A process of copy-making suggested transformations through a translation from one visual text obtained through a two-dimensional surface into a three-dimensional architectonic description.

The resulting physical construct was the outcome of a translation of found spatial information into a structure which refused to use surface as pure and singular text.

The site of operation, the two-dimensional surface, was seen as a site in permanent transformation through a process oriented drawing ritual. The work was then read as a thin new layer created through the rereading of indefinite simultaneous other layers of information.

The problem of the Berlin project was partly that the reading material consisted largely of established institutionalised art. The material available even if one tries to avoid the institutionalised information is certainly still indefinite.

As Rosalind Krauss has put it:

> The copyist is not only the slave of imitation. He is also at times
> the master of invention. Needing to decide about ambiguous
> patches, he conjures a reading by imagining what would make
> sense...Futhermore, one's feeling that ritual or other kinds of
> repeated forms have their source of meaning in some long
> since forgotten referent from which the forms derived but
> which they no longer in any way resemble, only adds to the
> suggestive resonance of these forms. Their quality as coded
> vehicles of repetition is what gives them their aesthetic
> authority...The copy is simultaneously a term of demystification
> and process or rather of demystification because of process.7

In architectural design the spatial and surface representations used within the process are found in any space independent of size. They have therefore to be translated into an architectural space, which includes scale, use, logics of construction and projection of materials to be used.

The act of reading in architectural terms manifests itself through a process of re-representation of representation- the act of copying from found material, which will ideally shed some light on new possibilities for

understanding in critical terms the hidden orders of space. My attempt lies in the conscious perspectivism of the savage reader, that is, the uninformed as well as critical observer, distanced from the architectural institution through her gender, the reader as Virginia Woolf describes her 'with a difference of view and a difference of standard'.

The outcome, ideally a persuasive novelty of a redescription through the eyes of the savage, disregards the reader's role as consumer but puts forward the reader as producer of meaning. Even if one can regard this work as being formalistic, since there has not been even a partial attempt to rationalise these copying exercises as anything else, I am still convinced that form and space in their pure aesthetic sense influence human activities beyond the statistical and into the metaphysical. The political aspect of the reading activity lies merely in the conscious attempt to select a frame and viewpoint, the refusal to accept the familiar as a rational and structured objective representation of reality, but merely as a text full of Socratic faith where the agreed-upon rules made by the few are declared as facts and rationally achieved results.

The major act in this process remains the choice of the material. As I see us confronted with numerous layers of information, the act of finding, which is of course at the same time an act of choosing, is a conceptually crucial one. One is always confronted with various choices: between historical high art, populist imagery, site related information or issues of experience. The process of copying allows you the possibility of inserting a graft, of adding another layer of concern to the process.

In the Los Angeles project I began to study how the found material can be entirely site related and translated into an urban public space. Rosalind Krauss describes this as a procedural space of transcription-of the translation of one medium into another.

REREADING THE CITY: AN EARTHSCRATCHER FOR CENTURY CITY
Project credits: Dagmar Richter with Joshua Levine, Theodore Zoumboulakis, Anna Bolneset, Cordell Steinmetz, Robert Thibodeau.
Before 1958, Century City was the site where Century Fox film studios had a whole array of simulated environments, including entire cities and lakes made to order. 30 years later after a 'succesful' planning effort, we are today confronted with a 'prestige address for business, shopping, luxury living, theatre going, dining and guest accommodation.' Century City is described by the local Chamber of Commerce as a landmark for modern urban development.

30 years ago when Twentieth Century Fox Studios faced near bankruptcy after their box office disaster 'Cleopatra', Welton Becket was hired by the developers and SP Skouras the chairman of the board of the Studios, to

create a concept that would transform the back-lot of the dream factory into a futuristic city thereby, through real estate transactions, rescue the film industry. The planners envisioned a total community, anchored by a strong business base. Today, Century City stands as the iedeal outcome of modernist planning and formal ideology. The emphasis lies on cleanliness, open spaces, verticality, a car-oriented infrastructure and its independence from the rest of the city.

Century City proved to be an interesting text to read. Most striking was the contrast between the sleek, mirrored, antiseptic anonymity of the current development and the haphazard, rather tawdry and vulgar nature of the self-conscious artificiality of its previous existence as a film set. A working process was employed that made use of three forms of site readings, one historical and two contemporary. First, maps from various times in Century City's past were copied and overlapped. These contained the traces and markings of forgotton landscapes: dislocated film towns, movable lakes and film production sheds, oil fields, orange groves and one-family bungalow structures which now once again rose to the surface. From these residues, a new topography of traces was elaborated that incorporated the previously hidden that had been bulldozed over by the developers.

Second, Century City's current state was also used. Two recording methods were employed:

A: The shadows of the site, the uncanny, a transformed trace of the object of study was recorded. In a ritual of recopying the obtained information, different speeds and directions transformed the text, to reflect the experience of the place as it is perceived while driving through. The shadows can be seen as a manifestation of a hidden order, an axonometrical collapse of the vertical object onto a projection screen-the space inbetween.

B: As a final study of Century City's current site condition, a photographic, or rather filmic, technique was used to allow analysis of the area's image. The dominant singular objects, the skyscraper's forbidding skins, celebrating their verticality and spatial control, were filmed, enlarged and recopied. This process revealed spaces of folding and layering in the otherwise sleek surfaces of the buildings that would have gone unnoticed.

During the further process emphasis was put on two distinct architectural properties:
1) Spatial boundaries
2) Infrastructural and structural elements.

Veneers, Surfaces and Boundaries
A filmic method, not necessarily used in its direct sense, as with cutting and splicing, but in its inherent structural logic, makes it possible to develop a space solely for the purpose of visual pleasure and as the carrier for human activity. The choice of working with veneer and surface can be traced back

to the site's former history as a ground for film-making where conceptually, the surface used had the sole purpose of 'not letting the character fall off'.8

Infrastructures and Structures
Construction, as an independent element in my reading, is used merely within the second set of copies, where the attempt is made to copy an order of structure and infrastucture onto the site. These structures develop in this project an existence of their own. In film sets, as in newer architectural sections, the importance of the space inbetween, the space of fasteners, insulation, air buffer zones and second structures, becomes apparent. Different generic sections through skyscrapers were used to distill their rhythmicality and relationship to the buildings' boundaries. A transformation from vertical to horizontal allowed the repetitive elements to hold in place a linear infrastructure which was derived from a study of the elevator's role in Century City's skyscrapers, depicted within the shadow studies of the site. As a graft we used the form, but not the programme, of the Los Angeles freeways and train tracks to find dynamic horizontal layers which can be translated into bicycle paths, running tracks, magnetic railways and crosscalators. The working drawings which consisted of layers of copies from found spatial information, were used as a text further to develop working models for the study areas of skin and infrastructure.

Juxtaposition
In the next stage, the collapse of both working models into yet another structure allowed the first studies of incongruities between skin and structure, establishing an array of spaces inbetween. These incongruities were used to insert a critical rereading of the obtained space. The new model inserts itself onto Century City's structure as an architectural parasite in the form of an earthscratcher that connects two different green spaces through an array of surfaces, antiprogrammes and artificial landscapes. Numerous skins cover, connect, carry and shade human activities. This model stands as yet another text available tothe reader to interpret. It can be seen as a text about further spatial development for Century City.

Misreading
During the exercises done within the last years, one emerging aspect to be addressed within the act of reading and copying was the deliberate act of misreading. Misreading is used as a critical tool to help transform found spatial information when inconsistencies occur. During the process of copying the reader does not therefore necessarily try to match the incongruities to the found condition, but uses the gap to insert grafts into the process.

REBUILDING BEIRUT-MISREADING THE WAR
Project credits: Dagmar Richter with Theodore Zoumboulakis, Anne Bolneset,
Eileen Yankowski.

Strategies of Destruction and Repair
This project uses the plan material available to develop an architectural
strategy of repair. The studio chose to read the different maps of Beirut,
form antiquity to the fairly recent ruins of French planning. In order to
record a series of layers produced by catastrophes and repair. Catastrophes
brought about by human violence or natural disaster historically have
become a buried underlayer for the production of a new architecture. The
new structures chose to ignore the fact of a tragic repetition and tried to
produce a new image of undisturbed unity and timelessness.

The destroyed area of the markets between the place d'Etoile and the
Place des Çanons has been chosen as a site for an abstract operation. Today
as Beirut is contemplating its renewal, the development of the souk area
between the two plazas which has been largely destroyed, is hindered by
decentralised ownership. A different approach to new development will
reveal the layers of catastrophes, leaving the old operations intact and
simultaneously proposing new development. This requires new modes of
planning operations:
1) To think of the city in section depicting different layers of
    operations at the same time.
2) To have the courage to leave scarred areas as they have been
    found and help their development by adding new layers of
    operation.

As an overall move we used a deliberate misreading of two supposedly
unrelated but actually very related strategies:
1) the strategies of conventional war
2) the operations of conventional medicine
We used strategy maps of attack and counterattack which overlaid the area
with fields of tension and relief and used maps of operations on war victims,
where burned skin was relocated and wounds cleaned and sewn together to
formulate an architectural tactic, where 'strategy' and 'operation' are used in
a deliberate misreading to insert new structures into the destroyed area.

This tactic involved the development of an architectural veneer above
and around the destroyed souk area, encouraging new growth in the spaces
inbetween. This could be initiated by the neighborhoods themselves in that
they collectively sell the air rights above the existing souk area and then use
the financial outcome to renovate and upgrade the area without losing its
partitioned and decentralised character. Thin threads of pedestrian bridges
create a new urban network, which together with the veneer bandages

reconnect the gap created by that war. The new whimsical thread structures originate around the Place d'Etoile and will hover above and between the old ruins, new veneer territories, originating at the Place des Canons, are made by folding and unfolding the earth's surface. Through this insertion of new material a careful repair and transformation of the existing area will be possible without destroying its essence.

I find myself in an indefinite process of finding, transcription and reinscribing architectural space. This process folds upon itself, creating layers of small changes after every new architectural transformation. In no sense is the author dead. But there are many authors. There is a steady flux of people in my office who all in a profound way influence the next reading taken, as they are constantly asked to re-evaluate the found condition we are working with. Everyone of those who actively participate leaves numerous traces within the process.

I do not believe that after historicism fails architecture is left with nothing. The contrary is true, it is left with layers and foldings of spatial information that make the process of selection and elimination a crucial one.